

Tips, Resources and  
Recommendations  
during **COVID-19**

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Aga Khan Development Network  
***A Successful Return  
to School: Tips, Resources  
and Recommendations  
for Educators***



Aga Khan Education Services



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION



## **Challenge: Our New Reality**

COVID-19 has affected all our lives and will continue to do so for some time even as governments relax confinement restrictions.

As schools reopen, education systems and school administrators are putting in place measures to protect the physical health and safety of students, staff and families, and planning for the learning and wellbeing of students.

With uncertainty about timeframes, the impact of the physical distancing and restricted or part-time attendance at school by students, educators continue to face significant challenges that will require them to adapt and learn. Despite these demands, a 'new normal' provides many opportunities to improve practices and 'build back better'.

To be most effective, educators will need to be attuned to their own wellbeing needs, provide the psychosocial and emotional support that may be required by students (and colleagues) following this crisis, engage students, address learning gaps and re-ignite the joy of being at school.

## **Support for Educators**

Educators have showed formidable resilience, commitment, adaptability and professionalism in responding to the emergency call to maintain the learning of students confined at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. We applaud you.

### **Educators are now turning their attention to:**

1. Preparing for the resumption of school
2. Supporting the learning and wellbeing of students when they return to school
3. The likelihood of teaching through blended learning models

The following resources have been gathered by colleagues across the Aga Khan Development Network, to provide you with a curated list of practical tips and activities to support the relationships, wellbeing and learning of students post the COVID-19 confinement.

This new guide should be reviewed, contextualised and used, bearing in mind the responsibility of the educator to observe all precautions to protect the health and safety of students, other staff and themselves.

We hope this guide provides you with some actionable ideas as schools re-open. Please also check the resources we developed earlier for [families to support children's learning at home](#) and for [educators to support students learning during COVID-19](#) that have list of resources, activities and recommendations that will continue being relevant and useful to help with students wellbeing and learning, your own wellbeing and your relationship with students and their families.

## General Tips to Help Students Return to School

While education systems and school leaders will put in place arrangements to protect the health and safety of those in the school, here are 16 tips to help you prepare before and after students return to the school buildings.

### 6 Tips Before Students Return

- 1. Reconnect with your colleagues:** Make the time to meet your fellow teachers at the school to swap stories and reconnect; this will boost your wellbeing. Additionally, use this time to talk about the changes you have made to your teaching and what you want to keep doing, and then plan to make it happen.
- 2. Health and Safety First:** Familiarise yourself with the hygiene and prevention measures in place in the school so that you are reassured about your own safety and can explain and enforce the health protection routines to others.
- 3. Engage families:** Communicate with families early to build trust and manage perceptions of risk. Let them know you will initially focus on student wellbeing, relationships and sharing experiences of being at home. Advise them of new schedules and safety protocols. Ask parents/caregivers to talk to their children about the return to school measures and safety arrangements, and help their children understand their feelings and emotions. Request that parents let you know if they have concerns about their child including any bereavements or anxiety about returning to school. Be sensitive to these issues as you plan your back-in-school programme.

- 4. Communicate with students:** Send welcome back-to-school messages to your students before the school re-opens. Let them know you are looking forward to seeing them again, clarify the safety measures in place, the behaviours you expect, and what you are planning. If possible, communicate over phone directly with the older students and ask them for suggestions about the orientation activities they would enjoy and/or what they are looking forward to or worried about. Try to address these in your 'welcome week' timetable. Older students (and their families) may be concerned about the learning they have missed while at home. Give them clear information about examination timetables, accelerated programmes, catch-up lessons, reporting processes and who to approach for more information if they need it.
- 5. Plan a 'welcome week':** Coming back to the school will be strange and even frightening for some students, while others will be enthusiastic and full of energy. Most students will need time to readjust to each other, school routines and the school environment. Make sure your classroom is welcoming and organised. Your lesson plans for the first few weeks should include re-opening messages, schedules and activities that prioritise health and safety. Build in frequent formal and informal opportunities for students to re-establish connections with you and each other, and time to reflect on and discuss their confinement experiences. Students will also be expecting to re-engage in formal lessons now they are back at school, so gradually phase in regular classes.
- 6. Prepare for blended learning approaches:** As schools resume it is likely that not all students will be present in the building at once and not all students will attend school all the time. This means educators must prepare to blend physical class time with distance learning. Face-to-face time will be precious so focus on learning that introduces new content or concepts, involves group activities or peer learning, relies on expert instruction and uses resources that aren't available at home. Distance learning lessons should include activities that can be done alone, personalised and/or supported with print and/or on-line resources and information. It takes time to prepare distance-learning lessons so work with colleagues to divide preparation and share lessons and activities.

## 10 Tips When Students Return to School

- 1. Follow health and safety protocols:** Many students may feel anxious about their safety. Your first task will be to walk students through their daily health and safety routines, and make sure they can follow the new rules and understand why compliance is so important. Ask students for their ideas on the best ways to implement safety measures - this will give them a sense of ownership and buy-in to the new arrangements.
- 2. Prioritise relationships:** Meeting and 'catching up' with school friends again will be foremost in the minds of students regardless of their age, so make rebuilding the relationships between students, and with you, a priority. Use formal and informal activities and physical, non-contact team games in the open air to help students relax and reconnect - include lots of moving and playing into the first few weeks after school reopens for students of all ages.
- 3. Talk about experiences of confinement:** Before students can re-engage with formal learning at school, most will need to share their experiences of, and feelings about, the confinement. It will be important to devote sufficient time to this and plan, at least initially, that large parts of the day be used informally, in guided group discussion and activities, and in individual reflection tasks, to help students process and learn from their experiences. It will also be important to talk about COVID-19 and make sure students have accurate, up-to-date and age appropriate information about the virus.

- 4. Watch for signs of distress or anxiety in students:** Students will have different experiences of the confinement period and different reactions to coming back to school. Many families will have experienced bereavements and/or great stress and life challenges, and a few students may have been victim to, or witnessed, violence and other negative behaviours. Educators are not expected to be expert counsellors so listen to students' stories and watch their behaviour for anything out of the ordinary. Show sympathy, compassion and kindness to all students. If you are concerned about a student's mental health or safety promptly refer them to the school leader to receive the professional support they need.
- 5. Get 'all' your students back to school:** Being away from school will have resulted in learning loss and some students, particularly girls, disengaging from formal learning and being at risk of never finishing their education. Follow up immediately and persistently with families where students do not return to class and work with school leaders to identify and remove barriers to participation. Where students have returned, continue to monitor attendance and intervene promptly if you observe patterns of absence by continuing to engage families and communities.
- 6. Discover and value what students learnt at home:** Students will have learnt new things during confinement and many will have assumed greater levels of responsibility and autonomy as learners and as individuals – these benefits should not be lost. Educators play an important role in helping students to recognise and value what they have learnt. It is also important to assess how students have progressed in their formal learning while they were at home. This will help to make sure the planned curriculum is relevant and inform what catch-up is needed. However, 'testing' students when they are still adjusting to being back in a formal setting can be emotionally harmful and unproductive so initially use observation and conversation to assess students. Remind them loss of learning is to be expected and that while they will all need to work hard, everyone will catch up together.
- 7. Initiate remedial and/or accelerated learning programmes:** There will be students who for many different reasons have not engaged in learning at home and it is likely parts of the curriculum will not have been covered during the confinement period. It will be critical to quickly design and put in place accelerated learning programmes (i.e. bridging and catch-up classes). Educators will need to look in advance at what content may have been missed and make decisions about how to cover this material including considering how technology can help. To get the ball rolling, try teaming students with a peer to rehearse new (or forgotten) content and work through practice exercises.
- 8. Prepare students for distance and online learning:** Devote time to preparing students to be successful distance and online learners. Help them develop the technological literacy, personal characteristics (motivation, time management and persistence) and productivity skills (scheduling, information management) they will need.
- 9. Tap into volunteers:** Engage volunteers and students' peers as tutors, mentors, and additional help, after considering all safety protocols. Having had a taste of being a teacher-at-home some parents may be keen to help in the classroom - extra hands will free you to support vulnerable students.
- 10. Continue to improve your distance teaching skills:** Identify the IT and pedagogical skills you struggled with as a distance educator working from home - perhaps you found it difficult to maintain student engagement or manage student assessments. Take advantage of being physically present with colleagues to share effective practices. Organise peer learning sessions that specifically address your needs. Try online professional development programmes that other colleagues found helpful.

# On-line and Off-line Resources and Activities to Support Teachers when Students Return to School

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## 1. 'Welcome Week'

- Have students share their experiences of confinement by drawing pictures, creating cartoon strips, writing stories or developing mock newspaper articles.
- Ask younger students to draw a face to show how various statements make them feel (e.g. we have been staying home from school, we have been playing games with our family, we have been washing our hands for 30 seconds, etc). Provide older students with prompts (e.g. emotions during lockdown, what I learnt about my dad, I wish that .....) to stimulate discussions or reflective writing about their feelings and experiences during confinement.
- The Back to School Activity Pack for Children developed by Continuity in Education provides a table with activities educators can use to engage pre-primary, primary and secondary students. [Click here.](#)

## 2. Activities to reinforce health and safety

### Pre-primary

- Ask a different student to demonstrate handwashing to the class each day.
- Construct an "obstacle course"-style blockades using objects or chairs to discourage students from wandering over to their peers.
- Use story time to read children books about COVID-19:
  - **#COVIBOOK:** Downloadable children's book about COVID-19 in many languages. [Click here.](#)
  - **YouTube Baby Shark Song for Handwashing:** Kids' video for hand washing. [Click here.](#)

### Primary

- Have students make posters that promote the new safety rules and display them around the school.
- Ask students to draw a map of the school and mark in green the 'safe' spaces and in red the risk areas. Discuss what makes red areas high risk and what we can do to reduce the danger of infection.
- Talk to students about what makes a great video clip and have them script a short YouTube message to tell others how their school is protecting students' health. Organise for students to record their messages and show them to the class.

## Secondary

- Create jingles for young children to recite while they wash their hands.
- Ask students to critique and make suggestions to improve the safety arrangements at the school. Vote for the best idea and create a video or podcast to present to the school administration.
- Ask the class to generate a list of facts about COVID-19 and have groups of students research the science behind each fact then make a presentation to the class.
- Brainstorm a list of infectious diseases and have students work in pairs to present a report on rates of infection, impact, cost of research, conditions for transmission etc and present it to the class. Discuss comparisons with the coronavirus.

## 3. Activities to support students' wellbeing

### Pre-primary

- Ask students to draw their favourite 'confinement' toy and label the picture as each child describes their object to a small group. Ask questions about why this toy was important.
- Through storybooks, educators can talk about the emotions and feelings of characters in the story and point out behaviours from characters in a story that are helpful and caring. Asking simple questions about, 'What about the story makes you happy?' 'When are some other time during the day when you feel happy? Why?' Connecting the story to the children's daily life allows one to explore emotions and feelings through a more concrete pathway of inquiry.
- Physical Exercise: Focus on activities that don't need additional resources; and remember to exercise different parts of the body - twisting, stretching, curling, jumping, lifting, pulling, etc.
- Stress Busters activities from Save the Children. [Click Here.](#)
- No Limit Generation short videos and exercises – See Specifically Energizing and Empowering exercises and Calming Exercises (in English). [Click Here.](#)
- Yoga for Kids – There are many videos online about Yoga for kids. Here is one video. [Click Here.](#)

### Primary and Secondary

- Read a book/poem/article or watch a video about someone who was afraid but found a way to overcome their fear, and discuss the story with the group. Encourage students to share their fears and worries in pairs or small groups.
- Place2Be has created assembly ideas and classroom ideas and activities for primary and secondary aged children as students come back to school focusing on self-efficacy, hope, gratitude and connectedness.
  - Primary level resources, [click here.](#)
  - Secondary level resources, [click here.](#)

## 4. Activities to assess student progress and help them catch up

### Pre-primary

- Choose a theme (e.g. seasons, family) students studied at home during the confinement. Ask questions about the theme and have draw an important 'fact' they remembered. Use this opportunity to correct misconceptions
- Ask students to talk about a favourite character from the books read with them or stories told to them at home. Asking students additional questions about the text will help probe learning gaps and allow the teacher to support understanding if necessary.
- If families have access to a smart phone, ask parents and caregivers to share photos of any arts and crafts projects children completed at home (or bring them to school) and show the class. Ask students to describe their work and question them to assess learning gaps.

### Primary

- Chose a topic students studied at home and ask groups of learners to list everything they know about the subject. Encourage students to build off each other's ideas, allow peers to correct misconceptions and take the opportunity to fill learning gaps.
- Have students to pretend they are the teacher and give a 10-minute lesson to a small group that explains something they learnt when they were at home. Ask them to prepare their presentation, and devise 3 questions to use at the end of the 'lesson' to check what the group learnt.
- Remind students of a topic that was taught as part of the distance-learning programme and ask them to write down what they know/remember and what they still need more help with.

### Secondary

- Have students repeat familiar textbook exercises then self-correct their responses. Ask students to identify where they were incorrect and try to work out why. Schedule individual tutoring sessions to address self-identified learning gaps.
- Tell students they are going for a job interview to be an ambassador for distance education and have to justify the time they spent learning at home. Ask them to prepare an application that details what they know and can do now that they could not before, then team up with a peer to stage a mock interview. Instruction about the skills required in application writing and job interviews should proceed this activity.
- Put students into groups to devise a quiz (and provide the answers) on a topic that was taught as part of the distance learning programme. Administer one of the quizzes to the whole class and have students complete it individually, self-correct, then work with their group to fill in their knowledge gaps before taking a second quiz on the same topic (from a different group). Hopefully scores will improve.
- This article in Edutopia provides tips on conducting formative assessment remotely and links to additional information about digital tools to conduct assessments. [Click here.](#)